

PhD Thesis Summary

Representation and beyond

Female victims in Post-Suharto media

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PhD Public Examination, 12 June 2012

PhD in Social and Behavioural Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses representations of female victims in post-Suharto media. In so doing, it underlines the import of the fall of the New Order regime and the concurrent opening up of the media world in Indonesia. The study is based on notably influential issues that emerged among media producers, feminist activists, social scientists, policy makers, and general audiences during the period of study (1998–2004). Based on observations made in women's NGOs and other institutions concerned with women, interviews and informal conversations with individuals engaged in projects related to female mediation, and content analysis of a large number of mainstream and alternative media presentations, this study finds that the context of the reform (*reformasi*) in Indonesia constituted a major factor in influencing the changes that affected women and the media, and more importantly, on the burgeoning of the discourse of female victimization. This study also addresses the concepts of ideology, interpellation, identity, and agency to show how the media culture during the reform period, or rather the cultural producers during that time, constructed female victims' identities by sorting out and selecting the representations that represented the context and the history of the regime's change.

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KEYWORDS

Images of female victims, media, reformation (*reformasi*), representation, violence against women.

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the New Order (*Orde Baru*) regime and the vibrant women's political movements that preceded and followed it brought to the fore an ambivalence of gender identity in Indonesia. While the New Order had constructed a dominant system of gender ideology and practice, its fall gave way to a vigorous process of the reification, renegotiation, and the contestation of gender identity in the power vacuum that emerged. The allegation that the state had misinterpreted women's roles and had mistreated women became one of the chief discourses upon which the emerging feminist trajectories came to be founded.

The debates on cases of violence against women cannot be separated from the general discourse on violence in Indonesia in a particular time and context. In focusing on the discourse of female victimization, this thesis underlines the importance of the fall of the New Order regime and the concurrent opening up of the media world in Indonesia. It finds that this process necessitated a reinterpretation of female identity while new vocabularies were adopted as political statements in the current feminist movement. The term "female victim" and associated phrases became the vernacular language in the process of the "reformation" of women's identity in the post-Suharto period which this thesis observes during its first five years.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This thesis addresses three broad questions: first, why during this *reformasi* did images of female victims become so abundant in media presentations? Secondly, how were women represented as victims in the media? Lastly, in line with the questions above, how did this mediated new female identity play a role in shaping the nationalist gender ideology and frame the direction of the new feminist movement in Indonesia?

To answer these questions this thesis specifically analyses the representations which appeared in "public culture", including print media (comics, books, journals, newsletters, newspapers, and magazines), audiovisual media (video compact discs and radio/television programmes), and electronic-mediated media (internet).

Data for this thesis were collected via multiple methods of data collection. First, data were gathered through structured and unstructured observations at Rahima, Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, and the State's Office for Women's Empowerment. Secondly, data were collected through participatory observation extending to other NGOs and social groups concerned with women issues. Thirdly, data were amassed through interviews and informal conversations with individuals engaged in projects related to female mediation, including people involved in Offstream Production House, the